

Visual Thinking Strategies Framework

applied on site at a cultural heritage site or museum to reflect on cultural objects

At cultural heritage sites and museums, you will encounter physical objects that can be analyzed using this visual thinking strategies framework. Ideally you will select the same objects as a few other classmates, as this visual thinking process is best engaged in small groups.

VTS got its start at New York City's Museum of Modern Art in 1991 in response to a challenge from their Board of Trustees, who wanted to be certain visitors were learning from their education programs. What they discovered was that visitors didn't need to be given the answers to their questions, rather they needed permission to be puzzled and to think about what they saw. They needed consent to use their powerful eyes and intelligent minds, and time to figure things out for themselves -- to use what they already know to reflect on what they don't, which is the first step in learning. VTS became the process for helping museum visitors, and students, figure things out on their own. Visual Thinking Strategies is an inquiry-based teaching protocol appropriate for all grade levels. You don't need any special training to use this strategy. The goal is NOT to teach or preach or delve too deeply into the technicalities of each piece, but rather to encourage students to observe independently, interpret what they see, probe and reflect on thoughts, consider alternative meanings, and back up their comments with evidence.

Step 1) Each individual should look closely and silently at the piece for a minute or two. Avoid reading the labels/statements right away as you want to make your own observations instead of being led to conclusions based on the title or interpretive statements. After reflecting, you can look at the labels.

Step 2) Reflect individually or in small groups on four questions: a) "What's going on with this object?" This initiates the inquiry into the meanings: not just what's depicted but also what it conveys. Keep the conversation open to others' interpretations. Remember, all responses are valid. b) "What do you see that makes you say that?" which is a non-threatening way to introduce reasoning; students must provide evidence for their interpretations. Back up your statements with what you see in the object. c) "What more can we find?" which helps continue the conversation and deepens the meaning-making process. d) Since we are reflecting on Czech culture during this trip, does this object reveal anything about Czech culture?

Step 3) Link related comments whether students agree or disagree, or build on one another's ideas. By linking, you're showing how ideas interact, making sense of a conversation that otherwise might seem random, or disjointed. By connecting ideas that agree, you make it clear that drawing similar conclusions is often appropriate: "It seems that several people see that...." By linking ideas that disagree, you're indicating that it's also possible for different people to respond differently to something they see: "We have a variety of opinions here...."

After Visit) Use a tool like Voicethread to upload photos or sketches of analyzed artifacts, and orally discuss those items following the prompts in the visual analysis protocol. Embed your Voicethread on your Weebly portfolio page.

Describe/Sketch Your First Object:	Describe/Sketch Your Second Object:
A) What's going on with this object?	A) What's going on with this object?
B) What do you see that makes you say that?	B) What do you see that makes you say that?
C) What more can we find?	C) What more can we find?
D) What does this object reveal about Czech culture?	D) What does this object reveal about Czech culture?
Link Related Comments (Agree? Disagree?):	Link Related Comments (Agree? Disagree?):